

# **Committee on International Relations**

## **Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats**

### ***Statement of Congressman Robert Wexler***

#### ***The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Policing Advances and Remaining Challenges***

***March 15, 2006***

I want to thank Chairman Gallegly and Chairman Smith for holding today's hearing on Northern Ireland, the advances in policing reform and the challenges that remain. I also want to thank U.S. Special Envoy for the Northern Ireland Peace Process Mitchell Reiss for appearing before this joint subcommittee hearing along with the distinguished witnesses from the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Human rights NGO's.

Mr. Chairman, while there has been significant progress in Northern Ireland both economically and politically since the Belfast Agreement was signed in 1998 -- the promise of long term reconciliation and reform has not fully materialized despite the concerted efforts of London and Dublin as well as the Clinton and Bush Administrations. We are now at a critical juncture in this process where a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and its Executive branch remain dormant and outstanding issues still remain including police reform and the disbanding of all paramilitary groups.

One of the keys to ending the deadlock in Northern Ireland is full implementation of the policing reforms and Transition from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). In your testimony before the Europe Subcommittee last May you stated that substantial progress has been made in policing reform to ensure oversight and accountability and that the PSNI has successfully implemented a policy requiring that new recruits are split evenly between Catholics and Non-Catholics. In addition, according to Police Oversight Commissioner Al Hutchinson 114 out of 175 of the police reform recommendations made by the Patten Commission in 1999 has been implemented.

Despite implementation of a majority of the Patten Commission's recommendations several outstanding issues remain that are obstacles to restoring trust and reconciliation between Republicans and Unionist including the transfer of policing and justice powers from the British to a restored Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, the unresolved status of several high profile murder cases from the 1980's and 90's and Sinn Fein's decision not to participate in the 19 member Policing Board. While I fully sympathize with Sinn Fein and Republican concerns regarding the PSNI, I am hopeful recent steps taken by London including the recently introduced Northern Ireland Bill which transfers policing and justice powers will help pave the way for Sinn Fein to join the Policing Board.

Mr. Chairman, the relative tranquility and economic success the people of Northern Ireland are enjoying is deeply encouraging. However, issues at the core of conflict remain unresolved and require greater attention from the international community. In

this vein, the United States which played an historic role in bringing both Republicans and Unionist together eight years ago in Belfast must continue its role as a supporter of the efforts of the British and Irish governments', and above all of the people of Northern Ireland, to achieve a peaceful and lasting solution for future generations.